What Is AMD?

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Macular degeneration is a progressive eye condition affecting as many as 15 million Americans and millions more around the world. The disease attacks the macula of the eye, where our sharpest central vision occurs. Although it rarely results in complete blindness, it robs the individual of all but the outermost, peripheral vision, leaving only dim images or black holes at the center of vision.

There are several forms of macular degeneration, but the fastest growing form is age-related macular degeneration (AMD). AMD is the number one cause of severe vision loss and legal blindness in adults over 60 in the U.S. As our population ages, and the "baby boomers" advance into their 60's and 70's, we will see a virtual epidemic of AMD. Perhaps 14%-24% of the U.S. population aged 65-74 years and 35% of people aged 75 years or more have the disease.

There are two types of AMD - "wet" or neovascular and "dry" or atrophic. There is no cure for AMD, but new treatments are available for the wet form of the disease. There is no treatment for the dry form, but training and special devices can promote independence and a return to favorite activities.

More on Dry AMD

More on Wet AMD

Age-related macular degeneration destroys the clear, "straight ahead" central vision necessary for reading, driving, identifying faces, watching television, doing fine detailed work, safely navigating stairs and performing other daily tasks we take for granted. It can make it more difficult to see contrast and can change the way color is seen. Peripheral vision may not be affected, and it is possible to see "out of the corner of your eye". Vision rehabilitation and assistive devices can help people use their remaining vision effectively. The impact of developing AMD can be devastating to those who were independent and active prior to the onset of this impairment. Their visual world gradually diminishes into a vague blur, making ordinary daily activities challenging.

The macula is made up of millions of light-sensing cells that provide sharp, detailed central vision. It is the most sensitive part of the retina, which is located at the back of the eye. The retina quickly turns light into electrical signals and then sends these electrical signals to the brain

through the optic nerve. Next, the brain translates the electrical signals into images we see. If the macula is damaged, fine points in these images are not clear. The picture is there but the fine points are lost.

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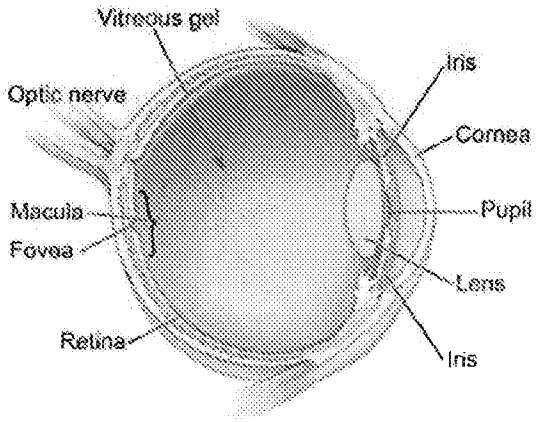

An Illustration of The Eye

provided by the National Eye Institute